'A Heavy Yock Uppon Their Necks'

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'A heavy yock uppon their necks': Covenanting Government in the Northern Highlands, 1638-1651[1]

The development of 'states' has long been a dominant theme in the historiography of seventeenth-century Europe, and in recent years, the relationship between central government and peripheral regions has emerged as one of the most significant components of the discourse. The resultant historiography is highly complex, not least because the details of centre-locality relations naturally differed between states, but two general theoretical models can nevertheless be discerned. The first, and much the longer-established, adopts what may be termed an 'imperial' approach to state consolidation, characterising the relationship as a predatory one in which drives towards assimilation came from the centre, often with the interests of the core dominating those of the locality. Alain Lottin, for example, in his assessment of Louis XIV's policies towards Flanders, points out that the Sun King lavished attention on the religious, political and social life of the conquered lands, all aiming 'to integrate Flanders progressively to the French administrative monarchy' and 'provide it with institutions typical of the French monarchy'.[2] The 'imperial' model has proved particularly attractive to historians of Swedish imperialism, and Anthony Upton argues that Charles XI adopted a policy of 'enforced assimilation' in Skåne which succeeded in sidelining the Danish elite of the province and merging it into the Swedish polity.[3] The second approach follows a 'collaborative' line, maintaining, in the phrase of Jeremy Black, that 'rulers were dependent on local institutions and also

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[2] Lottin, A., 'Louis XIV and Flanders' in Greengrass, M. (ed.), *Conquest and Coalescence: The Shaping of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Sevenoaks, 1991), pp.84-93, at pp.84-93.
[3] Upton, A., *Charles XI and Swedish Absolutism* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.179-85.

sought the cooperation of the locally influential'.[4] Ideas like these have been put into practice by a diverse range of scholars, including Henry Kamen, who argues that late-Habsburg Spain 'continued to be governed as it had been under Philip II, by a kind of consensus between various local interests'.[5] One must be careful of painting too black-and-white a picture, however, since the 'imperial' and 'collaborative' lines are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Charles Ingrao, for example, maintains that the Habsburg monarchy was able simultaneously to pursue a harsh 'imperial' policy towards Hungary and a more subtle 'collaborative' strategy in Bohemia.[6] All this makes for a rich and stimulating historiographical corpus which has done much to highlight the complexity of the state-building process in the early-modern period.

The centre-periphery issue is also of importance in a specifically British context, and has fomented significant debate between historians such as Michael Hechter and Jane Ohlmeyer, who profess an 'imperial' understanding of Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Scottish relations, and others, like John Morrill and Jim Smyth, who prefer a more contingent model that emphasises the interplay between English, Scottish and Irish interests, if not necessarily the equality of the three.[7] In purely Scottish terms, the Highlands are invariably identified as the most significant candidate for peripheral status. On the 'imperial' side of the fence, Julian Goodare states quite baldly that 'the region was to be treated as a colonial province, in which government was carried out for the benefit of the core state'.[8] By contrast, Allan Macinnes places greater emphasis on the role of the locality:

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[4] Black, J., *Kings, Nobles and Commoners: States and Societies in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2004), p.27.
[5] Kamen, H., *Spain in the Later Seventeenth Century 1665-1700* (London, 1980), pp.16-7.
[6] Ingrao, C., *The Habsburg Monarchy 1618-1815* (Cambridge, 1994) (Cambridge, 1994).
[7] Ohlmeyer, J., ' "Civilizinge of those rude partes": Colonization within Britain and Ireland, 1580s-1640s' in Canny, N. (ed.), *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1998); Hechter, M., *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (London, 1975); Morrill, J., 'The British Problem, c.1534-1707' in Bradshaw, B., and Morrill, J. (eds.), *The British Problem, c.1534-1707* (Basingstoke, 1996); Smyth, J., *The Making of the United Kingdom, 1660-1800: State, Religion and Identity in Britain and Ireland* (Harlow, 2009).
[8] Goodare, J., *State and Society in Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford, 1999), p.280.

> Chiefs and leading clan gentry ... had come to recognise the political, social and economic advantages of supporting the Scottish Crown and were seeking to ingratiate themselves at Court.[9]

The issue of centre-periphery interaction in the Highlands carries a particular significance for the mid-seventeenth-century, when it intersects with another historiographical debate regarding the strength and support-base of the Covenanting movement. Broadly, historians of the topic have tended to adopt one of three approaches. Firstly, John Roberts argues that Highland involvement – restricted, according to him, to the Royalist rebellion of 1644-6 – was essentially coincidental, brought about simply because it was within Gaeldom that James Graham, marquess of Montrose and Alasdair MacColla recruited their men.[10] Secondly, Edward Cowan, while accepting that Highland involvement in the conflict was intentional, maintains that the clans 'seized upon the excuse of raising musters for one side or the other, to indulge in private feud or vendettas'.[11] This assessment has recently been restated by Sherrilynn Theiss, whose discussion is based upon a variation of the 'imperial' approach; she argues that the policies of James VI, embodied in the Statutes of Iona (1609), had begun to 'civilise' the western elite and integrate them into the wider Scottish polity, but were allowed to lapse by Charles I and the Covenanters.[12] The result was complete dislocation between central government and the western clans, whose behaviour became increasingly autonomous and whose interests reverted to the purely local. All this leads Theiss to reiterate the idea of opportunistic involvement,

[9] Macinnes, A.I., *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996), p.56.
[10] Roberts, J.L., *Clan, King and Covenant: History of the Highland Clans from the Civil War to the Glencoe Massacre* (Edinburgh, 2000), p.83.
[11] Cowan, E.J., *Montrose: For Covenant and King* (Edinburgh, 1977), p.181.
[12] Theiss, S., 'The Western Highlands and Isles, 1616-1649: Allegiances during the "Scottish Troubles"' (University of Edinburgh, Ph.D. Thesis, 2006), pp.88-95.

predicated on the perceptions that Royalism offered the best means both of undermining the power of Clan Campbell and of alleviating the severe indebtedness that burdened most families.[13]

The third approach is that of Edward Furgol, who argues that the constancy of some family loyalties was such that only genuine ideological attachment, and not cynical opportunism, can explain it.[14] The distinctiveness of Furgol's position is largely rooted in the fact that, unlike Roberts, Cowan and Theiss, his focus is on the northern Highlands rather than on the west. This in turn illustrates an important deficiency in the historiography of the Covenanting-era Highlands; the overwhelming focus on the west (which in this context essentially means Argyll and Lochaber) has led to the trends of west Highland society frequently being taken as emblematic of the whole region. Furgol's work underlines just how erroneous such as approach may be, and the present article seeks to build upon his foundation through a detailed study of the far north. Encompassing the five northernmost shires of the mainland (Inverness, Ross, Cromarty, Sutherland, and Caithness), it will seek to understand how the Covenanting authorities addressed the centre-periphery issue through considering a range of themes in turn. These are, firstly, the degree of local political autonomy in the region, including an assessment of how meaningful was the distinction between 'Highlands' and 'Lowlands' in the context of the far north; secondly, the general governmental superstructure imposed after 1638; thirdly, the role of local elites in government, incorporating a quantitative analysis of office-holding patterns; and fourthly, the importance of Covenanting and Royalist ideology in the north. Such an analysis will allow for a rounded picture of how the government in Edinburgh interacted with the locality, which will in turn make a contribution to existing

[13] *Ibid*., pp.95-113, p.119 and at pp.184-5.
[14] Furgol, E.M., 'The Northern Highland Covenanter Clans, 1639-1651', *Northern Scotland*, 7, 2, 1987, p.129.

knowledge about the nature of the revolutionary regime.

Running through virtually every text dealing with Highland history is the concept that there existed in the region distinctive, 'Gaelic' forms of social organisation ('the clan system') and lordly culture which implied a degree of political autonomy from central government. Theiss for one is unequivocal in her contention that the decay of Jacobean 'civilising' policies after 1625 meant that western clans had no interest in the affairs of the core state.[15] The most exhaustive study of Gaelic lordly culture has come from Dodgshon, who has argued that Gaelic lordship relied on an extensive range of display behaviours (including feasting, hospitality and war-making) related, directly or indirectly, to the control of foodstuffs.[16] There is clearly some evidence that this kind of activity retained a degree of vitality in the western zone of the northern Highlands. Food-related competition remained endemic, so that Gaelic raiding deprived John Gordon, 13th earl of Sutherland and his tenants of no fewer than 1,770 cattle, horses and goats from various estates in Strathnaver, Breachat and Auchness during 1645 and 1646, while the clansmen of Ewan Cameron of Lochiel raided the lands of the laird of Moyness in 1645.[17] Slightly differently, George Mackenzie, 2nd earl of Seaforth's role as a clan chief came to the fore in 1644 when the threat of Alasdair MacColla caused him to abandon a commission awarded by Parliament in order to protect his west-coast kin and clients.[18] Yet the most striking illustration of a distinctly Gaelic approach to lordship was the use of banding, described by Macinnes as 'an insurance mechanism ... to pre-empt the escalation of

[15] Theiss, 'Western Highlands and Isles', p.85.
[16] Dodgshon, R.A., *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c.1493-1820* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp.84-98.
[17] Brown, K.M. *et al* (eds.), *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* (St Andrews, 2007), www.rps.ac.uk, 1649/1/78; Fraser, W. (ed.), *The Chiefs of Grant*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1883), ii, p.76-7.
[18] MacGill, W. (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland as seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1909-11), i, p.221.

minor disputes into major herschips'.[19] One such band was concluded between Seaforth and Archibald Campbell, lord Lorne (the future marquess of Argyll) in 1638, by which both parties promised to 'enter and become in the reall true and legall bond of amitie love and freindship' and to assist each other in all lawful affairs, all because 'our conjunctur and keeping of freindship may verie much tend to the advancement of Religione [and] the Kings Maj[es]ties service'.[20] This was not an isolated case – the Mackay gentry entered into a band of loyalty in 1645, pledging to resist Covenanting aggression, while an agreement in 1649 saw Donald Mackay, 1st lord Reay recognise Sutherland's superiority in return for a pledge of security.[21] Banding had been a marked feature of Scottish lordly culture in the later middle ages, and its decline in the Lowlands is often taken to signal the rise of independent state power.[22] Its persistence in the north-west is emblematic of an autonomous lordship style that continued to thrive in the west and which, in line with Theiss's assessment, had the potential both to foment disorder and act as a standing challenge to the authority of government.

Crucially though, the families of the eastern seaboard had long been conduits for the penetration of Lowland values and lordly culture. The Sinclairs of Caithness, for example, were not unique in being Anglo-Norman in origin rather than Gaelic, and had established a solid network of Lowland marriage alliances since acquiring their earldom in 1455, linking them to the Keith, Graham, Hepburn and Gordon families.[23] By the same token, the Sutherland Gordons were an off-shoot of the House of Huntly. As a result, the behaviour of these eastern families during the 1640s was largely indistinguishable from that of Lowland lords. The tomb built in 1642 for

[19] Macinnes, *Clanship*, p.10.
[20] National Library of Scotland, Advocates Mss, Ch.A.126.
[21] National Archives of Scotland, Mackay of Reay Papers, GD84/2/201, GD84/2/210.
[22] For background discussion of bonding, and the associated issues of feuding, see Wormald, J., *Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manret, 1442-1603* (Edinburgh, 1985) and Brown, K.M., *Bloodfeud in Scotland 1573-1625: Violence, Justice and Politics in an Early Modern Society* (Edinburgh, 1986)
[23] Paul, J.B. (ed.), *The Scots Peerage: A History of the Noble Families of Scotland*, 9 vols, ii, pp.337-43.

Christian Mowatt, lady Dunbeath, included such refinements as wall recesses corniced with crowns and shields and a window arch containing a portrait of the occupant at prayer.[24] David Ross of Balnagown maintained an account with the merchant John Lauder throughout the 1640s, and his orders included £71 of fine Spanish cloth and dozens of silver buttons for himself, 19 ells of black pink satin for his wife, and a mixture of coloured silk, calico and taffeta for his children.[25] The Frasers maintained notaries in Lovat and Stratherrik, while in 1649 their salmon fishery at Beauly reportedly sold 9,000 merks of fish to Aberdeen traders.[26] Most striking of all were the Urquharts of Cromarty, whose head for most of the Covenanting period – Sir Thomas Urquhart – was emphatically not a parochial Highland lord, let alone a Gaelic chief. He studied at Aberdeen University, travelled extensively in England and Europe (indeed, he was almost entirely absent from Cromarty until 1645) and wrote a range of eccentric academic treatises, including his *Epigrams* (1641) and *Trissotetras* (1645).[27] The families of the eastern seaboard thus had firm and long-standing links with wider Scottish culture and society. These were not 'clans' in the pure sense as described by Dodgshon, but Lowland-style families whose territories happened to lie within the Highlands.

Historians have long recognised this division between 'Gaelic' and 'Scots' lordly culture, which has led to a good deal of confusion over how to conceptualise the far north, and indeed the Highlands more generally, in relation to the wider Scottish polity. The simplest solution has been the idea of the 'Highland Line', a sharp demarcation indicating where one culture zone ended and another began adopted, for example, by Macinnes in his visual representations of clan distribution

[24] NAS, Sinclair of Caithness Papers, GD96/573.
[25] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, pp.142-3.
[26] Fraser, J., *Chronicles of the Frasers: The Wardlaw Manuscript Entitled 'Polichronicon Seu Policratica Temporum, or, The True Genealogy of the Frasers', 916-1674*, ed. Mackay, W. (Edinburgh, 1905), p.309 and at p.345.
[27] Stevenson, D., *King or Covenant? Voices from Civil War* (East Linton, 1996), pp.115-32.

within Gaeldom.[28] Yet the question of where to draw the divide between 'Gaelic' and 'Scots' lordship is something of a red herring for the far north, because there was in fact no clear distinction. The two lordly cultures could and frequently had intermingled prior to the Covenanting revolution, and they continued to do so. East-coast lords were not above adopting Gaelic displays; Hugh Fraser, 7th lord Lovat marked the marriage of his son in 1642 with a parade of 400 fully armed Highland warriors, while the laird of Kilravock advertised his wealth by offering hospitality so lavish that his house became known as 'a comon Inn where all were welcome'.[29] Equally, 'Gaelic' chiefs in the west were often adept at copying the behaviours of Lowland lordship. Reay acted as the King's Lieutenant Governor in the north, and in 1646 was comfortable enough in that role to issue a Commission of Fire and Sword against the Covenanters of Sutherland and Caithness.[30] Similarly, John Macleod of Dunvegan in 1649 exploited the fact that his lands had been on the front-line against Alasdair MacColla by persuading Parliament to exempt him for his tax liabilities.[31] The penetration of Lowland ideas from the east should therefore be seen as producing, long before 1638, a cultural greyscale in which many of the elite behaved as both Lowland lords and Highland chiefs, with the balance clearly varying between regions and kindreds. Methodologically this means that the northern Highlands would benefit from a holistic approach that neither imposes artificial distinctions between social groups nor prejudges the historical record by assuming that the eastern and western seaboards behaved in fundamentally different ways. In terms of the political independence thesis, it should be recognised that the distinctive character that north Highland lordship clearly boasted by the Covenanting period did not mean that lords

[28] Macinnes, *Clanship*, pp.242-6. These maps are in fact rather misleading because, in his prose analysis, Macinnes does not really accept the idea of an easily identifiable 'Highland Line'
[29] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, p.278; Rose, H., *A Genealogical Deduction of the Family of Rose of Kilravock* ed. Innes, C. (Edinburgh, 1848), p.91.
[30] NAS, GD84/2/203.
[31] *RPS*, 1649/1/409.

were culturally isolated from wider Scottish society, or that the ability to think and behave in a 'Gaelic' manner necessarily implied autonomy from central government.

Also of critical importance to the conventional assessment of Highland estrangement from central authority is the idea that inter-family relations were an inherent source of destabilisation. The main issue is feuding, and Stevenson goes so far as to argue that 'inter-clan wars ... became endemic in the Highlands.'[32] Theiss concurs with reference to the west, and views feuding as emblematic of the lack of any substantial relationship between centre and periphery.[33] Much the most significant northern feud in the Covenanting period was that between the Mackays of Reay and the Sutherland Gordons, already traditional enemies since at least the reign of Mary. Land was at the centre of the dispute, specifically Strathnaver, the Mackay heartlands over which Sutherland had claimed superiority since 1642.[34] In 1647 for example, the Mackays were forced to acknowledge Sutherland as their superior and agree to 'consent to the possessioun of the Landis off Strathnaver dispondit be ws To the Earle off Su[the]rland To be sett according to his pleass[u]r'.[35] Typically for a feud, both sides used violence to further their causes. The Mackays were accused of committing 'wrongs, oppressiounes and robberies' against Sutherland and 'uptaking of the rents and dewties of [his] lands…with there friends and a great number of Irish rebells', and Sutherland reportedly maintained a standing force of 400 men.[36] A complicating factor was that the Mackays were Royalist while Sutherland was one of the most consistently Covenanting nobleman in Scotland, with the exception of Argyll. Inevitably, the government got involved on Sutherland's behalf, showering him with money, men and supplies. In 1647, for instance, Parliament awarded the

[32] Stevenson, D., *Highland Warrior: Alasdair MacColla and the Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 1980), p.19.
[33] Theiss, 'Western Highlands and Isles', p.97.
[34] Grimble, I., *Chief of Mackay* (Edinburgh, 1993), p.151.
[35] NAS, GD84/2/207A.
[36] *RPS*, 1649/1/67.

earl obtain 200 muskets, 200 swords and 100 cannonballs, along with a party of 500 soldiers to supplement his own forces.[37] The dispute was all but over by the middle of 1649, when the adherence of the 2nd lord Reay to the pseudo-Royalist rising led by Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscarden led to his imprisonment. Other family conflict also reignited during this period – between, for example, Macleods and Mackenzies or Mackenzies and Frasers – but the Gordon-Mackay struggle is the most striking illustration of both the challenges and opportunities that feuding presented to the government. Violence and disorder were unavoidable consequences, and sponsorship of one side or the other did result in the diversion of public resources into private hands. But the fact that *ante bellum* conflicts tended to mirror the fault-line between Covenanting and Royalist ideology (or, perhaps more accurately, vice-versa) meant that the government could align itself with the interests of its clients in the locality and thereby augment its own ability to enforce conformity. Feuding was a threat to the rule of law; it was also an ideal opportunity for the Covenanters to exploit the political climate of the locality in order to root out dissenting elements.

In any case, it is important to recognise that feuding was atypical,[38] and under normal circumstances inter-family relations were far less disruptive. It was perfectly possible for disagreements to be settled peacefully through arbitration. In late 1639, for example, Kilravock and Rory Mackenzie of Redcastle agreed to settle a border dispute by referring it to a panel of 'freindis, arbitratoures, newtrallie and indifferentlie electit, nominat and chosin…for cognoscing, satling and desyding of the controuerse of the merches betwixt the landis of Leadanache and Torgormach'.[39] Moreover, the likelihood of friction emerging in the first place was significantly

[37] *RPS*, 1646/11/537; NAS, Register of the Committee of Estates, PA11/5, f.13r.
[38] It could be argued that the oft-repeated assertion that feuding was endemic to Highland Scotland is another symptom of the over-analysis of the Campbell-dominated west at the expense of other areas.
[39] Rose, *Genealogical Deduction*, pp.325-6.

lessened by a number of mechanisms for forging alliances. In 1641, for instance, Sutherland attempted to win the friendship of Balnagown by sharing information:

> Witness my rediliness to do you service, this day I have learned [tha]t ane partie of Sinclair's Shouldiours should goe to ... your bounds to help Commis[sione]r Cochren to tak up the tenth and twentie pennie.[40]

The most fundamental tool, however, was marriage, and indeed the network of marriage alliances in place in the 1640s was labyrinthine in the extreme. Lovat married daughters to Sutherland, Balnagown and Sir John Sinclair of Dunbeath; a niece of Seaforth's married John Sinclair, master of Berriedale; Reay married a second niece of Seaforth's, while his daughter married Sir Roderick Macleod of Talisker and his son married Berriedale's aunt.[41] These were often major undertakings. The marriage of Katherine Fraser to Dunbeath in 1643, for the celebration of which Lovat travelled personally to Dunrobin, was accompanied by a lengthy contract that included a tocher of £10,000 and Katherine's investment in life-rent with the barony of Dunbeath.[42] In return, marriages could offer useful diplomatic channels. A dispute in 1643 between Sutherland and Balnagown, relating to the theft of some of the former's horses, was moved towards resolution because Sutherland's wife, Anna Fraser, was able to open a dialogue with Balnagown while visiting her sister, Mary Fraser, to whom Balnagown was married.[43] If the Gordon-Mackay conflict illustrates the difficulties inherent in feuding, the far more typical reliance on

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[40] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, p.219.
[41] Paul, *Peerage*, *passim*. For the wider issue of noble marriage patterns, see Brown, K.M., *Nobel Society in Scotland: Wealth, Family and Culture from Reformation to Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2000).
[42] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, pp.284-5; NAS, GD96/576.
[43] NLS, Sutherland Papers, Dep.313, f.490.

peaceful interaction shows that internecine conflict was not the ever-present threat to order and stability that has traditionally been supposed.

More than either cultural estrangement or internecine conflict, kinship is the feature of Highland lordship that is usually considered to set it apart. The exercise of authority in the north was certainly complicated by the existence of kin networks, which can be characterised in part as private support systems. For the leadership, this meant a ready stock of servants. In 1640, John Grant of Freuchie sent letters to three Grant vassals requesting they persuade the ex-outlaw James Grant to set caution for relieving Freuchie of losses he had suffered on Grant's behalf, while the journey in 1642 of the master of Lovat to Edinburgh, in order to take up a commission in the army, was financed by contributions from the Fraser kin.[44] Lesser men for their part enjoyed a degree of protection. When, in 1639, four Frasers assaulted the Inverness burgess Jasper Cumming, they were pursued and imprisoned by a small force under the direction John Cuthbert, another burgess. In retaliation, Lovat lodged a complaint with the Committee of Estates the following year, accusing Cuthbert of assault.[45] Emblematic of this sense of mutual obligation was the emergence in times of trouble of family 'trusts' to protect the family's possessions. The Rosses adopted this practice in 1649, when representatives of the Pitcalnie, Invercharron and Priesthill septs agreed on a number of measures, including household cuts and building up timber resources, for restoring the solvency of the Balnagown estate.[46] All this could conflict with the rule of law. In the early 1640s, a dispute between two members of the Bruce family, both claiming the lands of Stanstell in Caithness, was complicated by the fact that one was married to a daughter of Dunbeath, and so was able to use Sinclair influence to further his own claims and hinder all legal challenges mounted

[44] Fraser, *Chiefs*, ii, 69; Fraser, *Wardlaw*, pp.279-81.
[45] Highland Council Archives, Inverness Town Council Minute Book, 1637-1655, IB1/1/4, fo.13.
[46] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, p.274.

against him.[47]

Crucially though, kinship ties were not unbreakable, and they certainly did not guarantee that every family maintained internal coherence in relation to the Covenanting-Royalist dynamic. The Sinclair gentry were split after 1648, with the lairds of Canisbay, Murkle and Ulbster serving the Engagement, and a group including Dunbeath, Assery and Ratter adhering to the 'Kirk Party'.[48] Similarly, one prominent member of the staunchly Covenanting Frasers, Colonel Hugh Fraser, was involved in Pluscarden's rising in 1649.[49] Furthermore, family ties were not always a sufficient guarantee that rights and obligations would be fulfilled. In 1640, for example, George Gordon, Sutherland's brother, reported that several client families had abandoned the Gordons in pursuit of private enrichment, and in the same year, letters were issued against George Sinclair, 5th earl of Caithness, threatening him with horning unless he act upon an earlier promise to confirm land grants awarded to his brothers.[50] All this indicates that the role of kinship in north Highland society was rather more equivocal than is often suggested. In any case, it would be wholly inaccurate to suggest that kinship as a political force was restricted to the Highlands, and Rosalind Marshall's classic account of the Hamilton family has highlighted the extent to which real and perceived ties of kinship shaped and reinforced the authority of that noble line.[51] Kinship therefore offered northern Highlanders a comprehensive support system which was outwith the regime's direct control, and with the in-built potential to challenge its hegemony, but this was hardly unique in a Scottish context.

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[47] Masson, D., and Hume-Brown, P. (eds.), *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Second Series*, 8 vols (Edinburgh, 1899-1908), vii, pp.334-5.
[48] Furgol, 'Covenanter Clans', p.123. The 'Engagement' was an agreement in late 1647 between Charles I and a moderate faction of Covenanters, whereby the latter agreed to invade England in support of the king, while Charles agreed to accept presbyterianism in Scotland, and give it a three-year trial run in England.
[49] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, p.339.
[50] NAS, GD96/559.
[51] Marshall, R.K., *The Days of Duchess Anne: Life in the Household of the Duchess of Hamilton, 1656-1716* (East Linton, 2000), pp.32-3.

Equally, kinship was neither sufficiently sturdy to allow complete autonomy, nor, as will be shown below, necessarily incompatible with the effective operation of government.

Recognising that lordship in the northern Highlands was not necessarily any more dismissive of central government than lordly culture farther south is crucial, because it ties the region into one of the most significant historiographical motifs of the Covenanting period, namely the strongly centralising nature of the revolutionary regime. A good recent example of this line of thinking is the work of John Young on the Scottish Parliament, which concludes that the Covenanters moulded that institution into one of the most powerful representative bodies in Europe.[52] It is not difficult to understand why centralisation has been such a beguiling model, because the sophisticated committee structure created after 1638 was quite blatantly intended 'to make the localities responsive to central directives from Edinburgh'.[53] Theiss argues that this trend was of minimal relevance to the western Highlands, where Edinburgh's imposition of emergency measures to combat Montrose's rising represented the only point of contact between centre and periphery.[54] The situation in the northern Highlands was quite different, and the new structures of the Covenanting government were clearly influential. It is a measure of their confidence that, in 1640, the Committee of War for Ross sent summonses to local luminaries, including Balnagown, Hector Douglas of Muldarg, and the Provost of Tain, demanding they attend committee meetings.[55] Such consciousness of position was not without

[52] Young, J.R., *The Scottish Parliament 1639-1661: A Political and Constitutional Analysis* (Edinburgh, 1996), p.324. Young, J.R., 'The Scottish Parliament in the Seventeenth Century: European Perspectives' in Macinnes, A.I., Riis, Y., and Pedersen, F.G. (eds.), *Ships, Guns and Bibles in the North Sea and the Baltic States, c.1350-c.1700* (East Linton, 2000), p.158.
[53] Macinnes, A.I., 'The Origin and Organization of the Covenanting Movement during the reign of Charles I, 1625-41; with a particular reference to the west of Scotland', 2 vols (University of Glasgow, Ph.D. Thesis, 1987), ii, 481.
[54] Theiss, 'Western Highlands and Isles', pp.113-21.
[55] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, p.220.

justification. In 1650, during a dispute over the glebe of Dingwall parish, the presbytery decided to contact the Ross-shire committee for advice.[56] This willingness to recognise the authority of local committees was evidently matched by a respect for the committee structure of central government. When Balnagown and Sutherland missed a rendezvous at Aberdeen arranged by the Committee of Estates in 1644, the two decided to meet at Dornoch and settle on a suitable explanation to give the Committee.[57] A more negative example of Covenanting innovation can be seen in the fate of Justices of the Peace. Traditionally much maligned, Justices have recently enjoyed something of rehabilitation thanks to Goodare, who characterises them as one of James VI's more successful innovations for intruding central influence into the locality.[58] The office, however, was one of the few swept away during the revolution, and even when Justices did eventually reappear, in June 1649, there is no evidence that they attained the kind of position outlined by Goodare. Indeed, their striking absence from either state or private records makes it implausible to claim that Justices were ever a particularly important part of Covenanting governance. The northern Highlands, then, clearly experienced the novel aspects of revolutionary rule, and had little compunction about engaging with them.

Yet the importance of new developments must not be exaggerated. Their very newness could be problematic, and jurisdictional uncertainty was not uncommon. As late as 1651, Inverness complained that the Committee of War for Nairn had infringed its burgh privileges during a recent levy, since it had 'presumed without anie warrand to assigne the said toune to the Laird of Grant as a part of his division'.[59] The accustomed rights of the nobility could lead to similar tensions when they collided

[56] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, p.180.
[57] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, p.221.
[58] Goodare, J., *The Government of Scotland 1560-1625* (Oxford, 2004), pp.203-7.
[59] NAS, PA11/10, fo.46.

with government attempts at administrative rationalisation. In 1649, Hugh Fraser, 8th lord Lovat, sent a petition to Parliament:

> Q[uhai]ras the Lord Louatt hath formerlie put out his horss and foott in rela[t]ine to the diui[si]un betuixt the Lord Seafforth and him, q[uhi]ch albeit named a diui[si]une, yet trew it is thair is none contenit thairin bot thair freindes, q[uhai]rby The Lord Louatt and his freindis ar mightilie preiudyeit by thair non equallis burding [burden].[60]

This does not mean, however, that there was an intractable tension between 'old' and 'new' authority systems, not least because the new structures could not necessarily be relied upon. In fact, by 1651 the Committee of Estates was forced to rebuke the Committees for both Ross and Caithness for attempting to manipulate their horse and foot levies.[61] Moreover, the government was often quite happy to allow the perpetuation of accustomed structures. In 1641, Parliament explicitly ratified the charters and traditional liberties appertaining to Wick, Rosmarkie and Inverness burghs.[62] This conservatism made sense, because the revolutionary regime often relied heavily on pre-existing authorities. Both the presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall took active responsibility for implementing the Covenanting tax system,[63] and it is noteworthy that the newly-erected local executives were based upon the pres-existing shire boundaries of Inverness-shire, Ross, Cromarty, Sutherland, and Caithness. Goodare has advanced an imperialistic model of local government in the Highlands, suggesting that the centre converted landed elites into Scottish gentlemen

[60] NAS, Supplementary Parliamentary Papers, PA7/6, fo.93.
[61] NAS, PA11/10, fo.72; fos.105-6.
[62] *RPS*, 1641/8/412; 1641/8/413; 1641/8/425.
[63] NAS, Minutes of the Presbytery of Inverness, CH2/553/1, 12; Mackay, W., and Laing, G.S. (ed.), *Records of Inverness*, 2 vols (Aberdeen, 1911-24), ii, pp.190-1.

and then relied upon them to diffuse Lowland values and government authority.[64] The role of lordship will be discussed below, but what is already apparent is that the Covenanting regime in the far north was considerably more sophisticated than Goodare's model allows. It was able to exploit a range of channels, old and new, official and otherwise, to heighten its presence. Significantly, this accords exactly with Stevenson's assessment of Covenanting governance more generally:

> The covenanters had no wish to destroy the old structure; parts were taken over and allowed to contine much as before, parts were by-passed or virtually replaced but nonetheless allowed to continue to exist nominally.[65]

Covenanting government in the northern Highlands, then, worked upon exactly the same principles as guided the movement further south. This was not an alien region treated as qualitatively different from the rest of the country; it was simply another locality, approached like any other.

Messy as the Covenanters' governing framework was in the north, it did enjoy some success in heightening the authority of the centre. Indeed, the *Chronicles of the Fraser* paints an almost Orwellian picture:

> Though many would willingly rise and act for the king, [they] are forced to lurk and be quiet, haveing so powerfull an adversary to grapple with, a heavy yock uppon their necks, and enslaved to a submission; garrisones everywhere over their heads, troupes of horse quartered up and down the country.[66]

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[64] Goodare, *Government of Scotland*, pp.242-5.
[65] Stevenson, *Government of Scotland*, p.xlvii.
[66] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, pp.321-2.

That this was not wholly artistic licence is shown by a letter of 1646, in which Sutherland warned Balnagown that he should not attempt to manipulate the military levies imposed by the government, because 'in thir dayes it is dangerous to dissobey the estates orders'.[67] Equally, there was a clear understanding that Edinburgh represented a legitimate higher authority to which appeals could be made. For example, when a dispute arose between Thomas Mackenzie of Inverleal and the Committee of War for Ross over the former's alleged refusal to offer assurances for keeping the peace, both parties sought to bolster their cause by addressing petitions to Parliament.[68] The government, for its part, was not afraid of taking firm action as a means of imposing conformity, and in the northern Highlands, the Mackays of Reay were its primary targets. In 1644, James Livingstone, 1st earl of Callander, was ordered to arrest Reay and his associates as 'unnaturall cuntriemen', while five years later, David Leslie, one of the leading Covenanting generals, was ordered completely to disarm the still recalcitrant Mackay lands of Strathnaver.[69] Clearly, the far north had little problem recognising not only the power of the Covenanting government, but its legitimate claim to hegemony over the Scottish polity, while the government itself had few compunctions about exercising its authority.

However, that authority could only be exercised in the face of substantial challenges, not least of which was the age-old problem of distance. So remote was the north that, in 1647, it was decided to allocate an extra pair of shoes to each of three hundred soldiers dispatched to Sutherland, on account of 'the lenth of the jorney thither and of the tryll and trouble they will be put to'.[70] By the same token, local variation complicated any attempts to implement a uniform system of national

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[67] MacGill, *Old Ross*, i, pp.222-3.
[68] *RPS*, A1649/5/28; A1649/5/43.
[69] *Ibid.*, 1644/6/56; NAS, PA11/8, fo.76.
[70] NAS, PA11/5.

government. In 1641, the rule that shire commissioners to Parliament have their expenses paid solely by taxing Crown freeholders within their shire was overturned for Sutherland, because only two individuals there held their lands directly from the king, while in 1649 Caithness sought to extend the franchise beyond its conventional restriction to freeholders, because there were simply too few of these to constitute an adequate electorate.[71] There was of course nothing especially 'Highland' about these kinds of local peculiarities, but they probably explain the apparent anomaly that decentralisation remained as crucial to the Covenanters as it had been for previous regimes. At the beginning of the period, the Privy Council decided it was inconvenient for the newly-appointed sheriffs of Inverness and Caithness to travel to the capital for giving their oaths of office, and therefore gave commissions allowing Seaforth and George Gordon, 2nd marquess of Huntly to receive these oaths locally.[72] Moreover, there was a clear reliance on local, particularly church, bodies for carrying out government business. For example, between 1649 and 1651 the presbytery of Dingwall took responsibility for hearing, sentencing and absolving all those classed as malignants under the Act of Classes (legislation passed in 1649 and aiming to exclude all but the most zealous Covenanters from public office), with most of these cases never leaving the presbytery.[73] If this illustrates the importance of delegation, it also reinforces the striking lack of differentiation between the far north and the rest of the country – after all, as Allan Macinnes points out, the exploitation of parishes and presbyteries as units of administration was from the very beginning a crucial feature of the Covenanting regime throughout Scotland.[74]

It must also be understood that consensus-building was just as important as

[71] *RPS*, 1641/8/152; 1649/1/401.
[72] *RPCS*, vii, pp.102-3.
[73] Mackay, W. (ed.), *Records of the Presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall* (Edinburgh, 1896), *passim*.
[74] Macinnes, A.I., *Charles I and the Making of the Covenanting Movement* (reprinted Edinburgh, 2003), p.205.

raw strength in shoring up government control, and at no time was this tendency stronger than during the rebellion led by Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscarden in early 1649. On 19 March, the Committee of Estates wrote to Inverness, noting the burgh's loyalty, seeking to 'render yow thankes for the same', and cement its future constancy by promising that 'wee shall be redie at all occasionis to make it appeare that wee are verie sensible thairof'.[75] A month later, as the rebellion spread southwards, the Committee wrote to the men of Badenoch and Lochaber, pleading with them to remain loyal:

> Our earnest care to preserve the Peace of the Kingdome acording to the trust reposed in ws, hath moved ws at this time to desyre yow not to suffer your selffes to be misled in the way of rebellion by anie specious pretences or false suggestions, nor to comply or joyne with anie that shall ryse in armes to the disturbance of the peace of the Kingdome.[76]

On the same day, similar letters were dispatched to the lairds of Freuchie and Balnagown.[77] Nor was this reliance on persuasion and 'soft power' restricted to 1649; three years earlier, the Committee had written to the Governor of Inverness, praising him for his loyalty and promising that 'altho our straits and wants of money be great at this time' they would do their utmost to ensure he was properly rewarded.[78] The government therefore proved itself just as adept at wielding the carrot as the stick, and this emphasises the main point: despite the revolutionary and integrationist facade of the Covenanting administration, established pressures of distance and local variation

[75] NAS, PA11/8, fo.13.
[76] *Ibid*., fos.41-2.
[77] *Ibid*., fos.42-5.
[78] NAS, PA11/4, fos.208-9.

ensured that consensual, decentralised and often *ad hoc* strategies were as crucial for them as they had been for the Stuart kings.

Emphasising the continuing balance between centre and periphery was the impulse of the revolutionary government to seek the cooperation of the local elite. This, of course, was a key feature of the Covenanters' success across Scotland, and it has been argued that the National Covenant itself was, in part at least, a device for binding Scotland's political elite in a common purpose.[79] Such party-building was vital in the far north too. In April 1638, for example, the leading Covenanters held a meeting at Inverness to which the earl of Sutherland, lord Lovat, lord Reay, James Grant of Freuchie, David Ross of Balnagown, and the master of Berriedale (among others) were summoned, with a view to explaining the Covenanters' grievances and 'to cleir all doubtis and scruples That may arryse in [th]e mind of ony man not truelie informed nor conceaving aricht these materis'.[80] The outcome of this exercise illustrated how useful elite backing could be in energising the locality, because later that month a number of the lords involved declared that 'we find our selffis sufficientlie satisfeit' and undertook to 'communicat the samen with the whole gentrie, ministers, and borrowis of the schyris of Caithnes, Sutherland, Invernes, [and] Cromartie'.[81] Theiss points out that this meeting cannot be taken to reflect the ideological stances of the chiefs involved because their signatures were extracted under duress.[82] This is true, but the very fact that the Covenanters undertook the exercise at all illustrates the perceived importance of local co-operation. Indeed, the very survival of the regime could rest upon the loyalty of the provincial leadership, and the failure of the marquess of Montrose to recruit men from Caithness during his

[79] Stevenson, D., *The Scottish Revolution 1637-1644* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp.84-5.
[80] NAS, GD84/2/194.
[81] Fraser, W. (ed.), *The Sutherland Book*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1892), ii, pp.169-70.
[82] Theiss, 'Western Highlands and Isles', pp.100-1.

1651 insurrection was attributed to the intrigues of Sutherland, who 'raised all his friends and followers indeavouring to hinder all that were willing to join with him, and stop all entercourse tuixt him and his friends'.[83] Conversely, elite hostility could be paralyzing. The Solemn League and Covenant (1643) suffered notably from this phenomenon: the parishioners of Moy in Inverness-shire delayed signing for more than six months because the laird of Mackintosh would not accept it, while in the parish of Lochcarron in Ross-shire, the hostility of the local landowner meant that subscriptions were still wanting by 1649.[84] Clearly, then, the Covenanters were deeply concerned about winning the support of north Highland lords, and given how important the influence of such men was in determining local responsiveness to the revolution, this was an eminently sensible strategy.

A major tactic for securing elite backing was to appoint family leaders to positions within government. Office-holding clearly had a central place in the government structure of the Covenanters, something which is well attested by the Estates' own delineation of what would fall within the jurisdiction of those sitting on Shire Committees of War:

> The committees…are hereby ordained to labour so far as in them lies to maintain unity and love amongst all his majesty's good subjects in these bounds…and if any tumult or insurrection break forth in the shire by malignants or other disaffected persons, to use all means to compose the same…And in case of any foreign invasion by sea or by land, that the colonels and commanders rise in arms with the whole strength of the shire, horse and foot, for resisting the same.[85]

[83] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, pp.351-2.
[84] NAS, CH2/553/1, 152-6; Mackay, *Inverness and Dingwall*, p.150.
[85] *RPS*, 1643/6.91.

Alongside the local executive role of shire committees, the Covenanting regime rested upon a network of other appointments in central government (session and interval committees, special committees, privy council and officers of state) and in a judicial capacity (sheriffships and special commissions). Table 1 displays the total appointments in each of these categories made to the heads of major kindreds, usually the chief but in a small number of cases the tutor or *de facto* leader.[86]

Family	Chief (C) or Tutor (T)	Central Executive	Local Executive	Judicial	Total
Chisholm	Alexander Chisholm of Comar (C)	0	1	0	1
Fraser	Sir James Fraser of Brea (T)	3	3	3	9
Gordon	John Gordon, 13th earl of Sutherland (C)	12	2	4	18
Grant	Sir John Grant of Freuchie (C)	2	3	0	5
Gunn	Alexander Gunn of Killearnan (C)	0	1	0	1
Mackenzie	George Mackenzie, 2nd earl of Seaforth (C)	5	0	5	10
Macleod	Donald Macleod of Assynt (C)	0	2	0	2
Munro	Robert Munro of Obsdale (T)	2	7	0	9
Ross	David Ross of Balnagown (C)	1	5	1	7
Sinclair	Sir John Sinclair of Dunbeath (T)	2	6	2	10
Total		**27**	**30**	**15**	**72**

Table 1: Office-holding amongst heads of families in the northern Highlands, 1638-51[87]

As this data illustrates, the Covenanters moved beyond seeking merely the acquiescence of local elites, and in the case of each of the major northern kindreds it attempted to win local support by actively involving the leadership in the business of

[86] Sir John Sinclair of Dunbeath was not technically a tutor. The two Sinclair chiefs of this period provided little leadership; the aged 5th earl of Caithness was reclusive, and the young 6th earl was warded by a largely absent conglomerate of Lowland lords. Dunbeath was, however, the most active and influential of the Sinclair gentry. The Royalist kindreds of Mackay and Urquhart are not included.

[87] See appendix for a list of the offices and office-holders considered in compiling the tables.

government. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of these appointments went to the most powerful chiefs, the earls of Seaforth and Sutherland, John Sinclair of Dunbeath and James Fraser of Brea prominent among them, and it is equally unsurprising that the highly motivated Sutherland hoarded far more offices than anyone else. But it is also telling that local executive appointments were the most widely distributed. This confirms that the perceived role of family elites was to help diffuse Covenanting authority into the periphery, even if certain individuals (especially Sutherland) were highly active in central government. Here again there is little difference between the far north and the rest of Scotland; the preponderance of Hamiltons on the Committees of War for Lanarkshire, the Kerrs on those for Roxburgh-shire or the Kennedys in Ayrshire illustrates the ubiquity of local elites as intermediaries of the Covenanting regime.[88]

However, the raw figures conceal important chronological variations. Table 2, using the same data, sets out appointment patterns over time, comparing the fluctuation in chiefly office-holding with those of their dependents:

Family	**National (1638-43)**		**Civil War (1644-7)**		**Engagement (1648)**		**'Kirk Party' (1649-50)**		**Royalist (1651)**	
	Leader	*Depen-dents*	*Leader*	*Depen-dents*	*Leader*	*Depen-dents*	*Leader*	*Depen-dents*	*Leader*	*Depen-dents*
Chisholm	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Fraser	3	7	3	14	1	5	2	0	0	0
Sutherland Men	3	16	6	25	2	13	6	2	1	5
Grant	2	2	3	4	0	3	0	0	0	0
Gunn	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mackenzie	7	4	3	8	0	3	0	0	0	0
Macleod	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Munro	0	0	6	3	2	4	1	0	0	0
Ross	2	1	4	3	1	9	0	0	0	0
Sinclair	2	13	3	27	2	9	3	2	0	0
Total	**18**	**43**	**31**	**84**	**9**	**46**	**12**	**4**	**1**	**5**

Table 2: Chronological Variation in familial office-holding in the northern Highlands, 1638-51

[88] *RPS*, 1663/6/91; Stevenson, *Government of Scotland*, p.xlvi.

It is of course important to recognise the limitations of this data and by extension the interpretive restrictions that must be imposed. The ten groups were not of comparable size, and it is hardly a revelation to find the tiny clan Chisholm lagging behind more populous families such as the Sinclairs. In the absence of detailed data regarding the precise numbers of potential office-holders in each group, the figures can only be used to arrive at broad and impressionistic conclusions about familial attachment to the Covenanting cause. Yet if attention is focused on the aims and strategies of central government, a number of more precise points can be made. It is telling that the Civil War period (1644-7) was the most fruitful and diverse in terms of familial office holding. That the widening of government reliance on family structures coincided with the Royalist insurrection indicates a belief on the part of the authorities that appropriating the pre-existing influence of the regional elite offered the best chance of preserving Covenanting rule. Equally, in terms of raw numbers, familial involvement in office-holding fell away noticeably from 1647, implying that the far north did not escape the factionalism of the later Covenanting movement. Indeed, support for the radical 'Kirk Party' was particularly narrow, attracting the involvement of just four groups as opposed to the totals of nine and eight enjoyed by the pre-1648 and Engagement regimes respectively.

Moreover, comparing leaders' office-holding patterns with those of lesser men more generally reveals much about the effectiveness of courting local elites as a strategy of control. Prior to 1648, fluctuations in the office-holding patterns of lesser men tended to mirror the involvement of their individual leaders, so that, as chiefs took on more offices, so did their dependents. There were exceptions, notably with the Mackenzies, whose haul of offices doubled between the national and civil war

regimes even though Seaforth's personal involvement decreased, but the general picture suggests that the government strategy of securing control indirectly through local lords was working. After 1648, however, the situation changed markedly. That the Engagement regime attracted vastly more support from gentry than chiefs, especially in the cases of the Frasers, Rosses, Sinclairs and Sutherland men, indicates not only a weakening of chiefly control, but that the Engagement drew much of its support in the far north from men of middling rank. The 'Kirk Party' support structure was almost a complete mirror-image, so that leaders such as Sutherland, Brea and Dunbeath (it is noteworthy that these latter two were only *de facto* leaders rather than full chiefs) got involved but failed to take their followers with them. The role of north Highland lords was therefore a complex one. Such individuals exercised enormous influence over the locality, and the government actively sought both their endorsement and active cooperation. While the Covenanting movement itself retained its homogeneity, this strategy proved largely successful in diffusing the authority of government. Yet with the splintering of the movement from 1648, the success of indirect control faltered, with leaders and their followers often gravitating towards different factions. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates that the influence of provincial lords over the locality, though extensive, was not all-embracing. Secondly, it highlights that the Covenanters, like James VI and Charles I, had to accept that ruling through regional elites could only guarantee local responsiveness if the government itself was able to command a general public consensus.

The fluctuations in office-holding after 1648 are noteworthy for another reason. The pattern of humbler support for the Engagement and elite backing for the 'Kirk Party' represents a total inversion of the national picture as it is conventionally

drawn. Hitherto it has been assumed that the Engagement drew its strength from aristocrats, while the 'Kirk Party' was sustained by men of lesser standing, especially gentry and clerics.[89] Indeed some have gone further; Walter Makey argues that the 'Kirk Party' regime was an alliance between gentry and clergy that used 'a feudal parliament to attack feudalism itself' – a quintessential bourgeois revolution.[90] There is certainly evidence that the Kirk assumed a more prominent role in the government of the far north after 1648, especially in terms of enforcing ideological conformity – the Kirk session of Petty in Inverness presbytery, for example, summoned all suspected 'malignants' to 'be at the presbeterie the next day to cleir themselfes' in October 1649[91] – but office-holding data suggests that this was not accompanied by a movement away from traditional chiefly and aristocratic control, probably because the northern elite had largely not served the Engagement. Escaping any disgrace at Preston in August 1648, they avoided being sidelined thereafter. There was, therefore, no call for the kind of radical, lower-order governance that exemplified 'Kirk Party' hegemony elsewhere. In other words, in as much as there was any expansion of the church's power in the northern Highlands in these years, it should be understood as reflecting a change in approach from central government, a temporary emphasising of ecclesiastical administrative structures over those of the secular state. Beyond this, however, the traditional ruling elite of the north retained its dominance. If this says something about the resilience of family leaders, it also raises questions about just how far the regime of 1649-50 represented a genuine subversion of

[89] Brown, K.M., *Kingdom or Province? Scotland and the Regal Union, 1603-1715* (Basingstoke and London, 1992), p.132; Mitchison, R.A., *Lordship to Patronage: Scotland 1603-1745* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp.59-60; Stevenson, D., *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003), pp.113-4; Young, J.R., 'The Scottish Parliament and the Covenanting Revolution: The Emergence of a Scottish Commons' in Young, J.R. (ed.), *Celtic Dimensions of the British Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 1997), *passim*.
[90] Makey, W., *The Church of the Covenant 1637-1651: Revolution and Social Change in Scotland* (Edinburgh 1979), p.81.
[91] NAS, Minutes of the Kirk Session of Petty, CH2/458/1/95.

aristocratic power, and certainly about the veracity of Makey's bourgeois revolution thesis.

However, if the major families played an important part in government office-holding, they did not have a monopoly. Table 3 compares the relative prominence in official appointments of those who did and those who did not belong to one of the major kin networks:[92]

OFFICE TYPE	APPOINTMENTS	FAMILY AFFILIATES		BURGESSES		OTHER GENTRY	
		No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*
Executive: Central	54	42	77.8	9	16.7	3	5.6
Executive: Local	348	189	54.3	60	17.2	99	28.4
Judicial	54	38	70.4	6	11.1	10	18.5
Representative	60	30	50.0	26	43.3	4	6.7
Total	**516**	**299**	**57.9**	**101**	**19.6**	**116**	**22.5**

Table 3: Familial vs. non-familial office-holding in the northern Highland, 1638-51

The major kindreds certainly secured an impressive degree of representation, and their supremacy in terms of central and judicial office-holding was especially striking. Similarly, although affiliates of the major families only secured 50% of representative offices overall, this is skewed by the fact that gentry and burgesses constituted separate parliamentary estates; viewed exclusively in terms of gentry representation, their share was nearly 90%. Nevertheless, the role of individuals outwith the major family networks, gathering more than two-fifths of appointments in total, cannot be discounted. The burgesses, indeed, retained a relatively constant hold over between one-tenth and one-fifth of all office-types, excepting of course the special case of parliamentary representation. Gentry without links to major family networks were

[92] 'Representative' refers to burgh and shire commissioners to Parliament, while all other classes of office are defined as in Table 1 above. 'Clan affiliates' in this case refers to those families discussed in Tables 1 and 2 above. In the absence of appointment lists, this data does not include the Justices of the Peace appointed after 1649. However, if the patterns of appointment followed by earlier commissions were repeated, it can be assumed that the trends highlighted in the table were borne out by Justice of the Peace appointments.

rather more erratic, but their poor showing in central and representative office was offset by strong positions in local and judicial office. The major families, then, should be recognised as the most significant of a range of social groups employed by the Covenanting authorities to sustain their administrative systems.

Beyond these general points, though, it is important to recognise the scope for local variation. The best means of tracing regional patterns is to concentrate on the Committees of War, since these were the only bodies with explicitly defined local jurisdictions. Table 4 charts the role of family affiliates, burgesses and non-familial gentry in the committees appointed for Caithness, Sutherland and Inverness and Ross (which were conjoined for all practical purposes) throughout the Covenanting period:

JURISDICTION	TOTAL APPOINTMENTS	FAMILY AFFILIATES		BURGESSES		OTHER GENTRY	
		No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*
Caithness	102	50	49	31	20.1	21	30.4
Inverness and Ross	216	117	68.5	64	16.2	35	30.6
Sutherland	73	50	53.4	18	6.8	5	26.7

Table 4: Local Variation in Committees of War, 1643-51

In general terms, the patterns were broadly similar. In each case, family affiliates formed the largest single group, followed by other gentry and then burgesses. Considered in more detail, however, these figures can be seen to reflect the social composition of each shire. In each, independent gentry were of roughly similar prominence, dominated by Cogles and Caddells in Caithness, Murrays in Sutherland, and Roses, Dunbars and Inneses in Inverness and Ross. More striking variation was evident in burgh participation, for which Sutherland, with just one burgh at Dornoch, was particularly infertile terrain. The Caithness towns of Thurso and Wick produced a notably more active class of men, and burgesses took over one-fifth of offices. The burgess class of Inverness-shire and Ross, spread across Inverness, Cromarty, Tain

and Dingwall, was only marginally less prominent, with the burgesses of Inverness (Forbes, Cuthbert and Baillie) and Tain (McCulloch and Tulloch) taking most of their 16% share. Equally telling was the division of offices between the individual families. In Caithness, the Sinclairs secured fully 94% of those offices allocated to members of the leading families, with just two other groups – Munro and Sutherland – sharing the remaining 6%. In Sutherland, the kin of the Gordon earl gathered 24% of appointments, while his two client families of Sutherland and Grey won an additional 46% between them. The much less homogenous tapestry of territories in Ross and Inverness was reflected in their more complex patterns of office-holding; fully 14 families shared the spoils, with only the Rosses and Frasers getting more than a one-tenth proportion. In the same way that employing family leaders was aimed at appropriating a pre-existing power structure, the Committees of War were clearly designed to exploit established networks of influence and authority by reproducing local society in microcosm. That this tendency went so far as to reflect the relative strength of the major kindreds within their home shires confirms the role of these groups as one means of cementing Covenanting authority.

The relationship between government and the major northern families was made possible by the fact that the former could rely upon a high degree of loyalty from the latter; the kindreds of Sinclair, Gunn, Gordon, Sutherland, Gray, Munro, Ross, Fraser and Chisholm all remained loyal throughout the period, compared to just two Royalist families (Mackay and Urquhart) and three whose commitments switched at least once (Mackenzie, Grant and Macleod of Assynt). These patterns cannot be written off as mere titular adherence. In 1649, the Committee of Estates praised Balnagown's 'affection to the cause and good deservingis of the Publict quhereof yow have given such reall proofe' as well as his 'readines to oppose the designes of all

such as wald disturbe the quiet of the Kingdome', and in the same year, similarly glowing recognition was accorded to Sutherland, Lovat, the laird of Dunvegan, the laird of Grant, the burgh of Inverness, and the heritors of Ross-shire and Inverness-shire.[93] Such observations, however, do little to address the most significant historiographical debate regarding Highland engagement with the Covenanting movement, namely the relative importance of ideology and pragmatism in guiding loyalties. The more old-fashioned reading (based largely on the situation in the western Highlands) was that self-interest ruled all, as in the analyses of Cowan and Theiss, cited above, that the clans simply used the Covenanting-Royalist dynamic as cover for pursuing private and local agendas.[94] Yet amongst some senior members of the leading families, there is clear evidence of the more high-minded attitudes identified by Furgol. In a letter to his father in 1638, the master of Berriedale, a grandson of the 5th earl of Caithness, explained his endorsement of the Covenant in distinctly ideological terms:

> I am sorie…that [y]e sie not the coruptiouns crieping in and gods worship already begun to be corupted, with human inventiouns, and christ rubbed of his spouse, and his freindis of thair christian Liberties, and his cause borne doun with authority.[95]

Similarly, the eulogy of Brea, the *de facto* head of the Lovat Frasers for much of the 1640s, given in the *Chronicles of the Fraser*, stressed that 'he had strong convictions uppon his soul' and consequently was always 'runing too much with the streame of

[93] NAS, PA11/8, fos.13, 42, 44, 74, 164; *RPS*, 1649/1/409, 1649/5/183, 1649/5/253.
[94] Cowan, *Montrose*, p.181; Theiss, 'Western Highlands', p.119.
[95] NLS, Wodrow Collection, Quarto xxiv, 8, fo.69.

the times, and too great a madler with state affaires'.[96] Any attempt to account for the patterns of adherence amongst the north Highland families must therefore accept that at least part of the explanation lies in the ideological sensibilities of individual lords or tutors.

Yet the veracity of the older historiographical model should also be acknowledged, not least because there was no absolute correlation between religious ideology and political affiliation. Thus, the presbyterian Mackays supported the King, the Roman Catholic Chisholms were Covenanters (though not terribly active ones) and the episcopalian Mackenzies vacillated between the two.[97] Pragmatic considerations guided north Highland involvement with the Covenanting movement in two broad ways. The first was protection of property and position. When the gentry of Caithness wrote to lord Reay in 1646, seeking to find out 'giue yow be Myndfull to joyne q[ui]th Montroes or till Invaid Sutherland', they did so not out of concern for the security of the Covenanting regime, but 'to now how [we] shall be assured peace concludit betuixt yo[u]r lo[rdshi]p yo[u]r Countray men [and] ws'.[98] Caithness also provides a striking example of how the desire to protect personal position could distract nominal Covenanters from carrying out government orders. In 1644, Sutherland complained that such behaviour from the Sinclairs was hindering the military effort against Montrose:

> The Laird of Murkell in Cathnes, who is conwiner off ther committee off war, doth always forslowe them in that shyre, and not only hinder them, bot by his

[96] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, p.384.
[97] Macinnes, *Clanship*, pp.248-9.
[98] NAS, GD96/561/3.

> reports off [in]wasione off my Lord off Reay and others by sea, and throghe the fears off the Clane Donald from the west, puts all others in suche feares.[99]

The second pragmatic stimulus was inter-family enmity. Deciding which side to join often followed the fault-lines carved out by old rivalries. For instance, an attack by the Royalist Macdonalds on the lands of the Covenanting Frasers in 1644 mirrored an earlier altercation between the two families, in which the former had been ignominiously defeated.[100] The war could also provide a useful cover for advancing on-going disputes, and in 1647 Assynt used the Royalism of the Mackenzies to freeze all outstanding legal proceeding initiated against him by that family, while raising fresh citations of his own.[101] The crucial point, of course, is that national and local interests were never wholly distinct. Huntly suggested as much in 1647 when he wrote to inform Reay of the king's surrender:

> In the meane tyme let not the present fare of thing moue you to abstaine from prosecuting your owne Iust affaires with any of your neighboures, for you may be Confident that his Ma[jes]ties affaires wilbe carried On and to the satisfaction of all his faithfull subjectes.[102]

Loyalties were therefore decided by a mixture of principled commitment and private interest. Luckily for the Covenanters, it so happened that this combination caused most northern kindreds to lean in favour of the revolutionary government.

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[99] Fraser, *Sutherland Book*, ii, pp.171-3.
[100] Fraser, *Wardlaw*, pp.289-90.
[101] NAS, PA11/5.
[102] NAS, GD84/2/207.

There is a clear case for arguing that the northern Highlands in the Covenanting period boasted a distinct identity, the dominant feature of which was hybridism. The kind of structures and trends normally associated with clan society were certainly in evidence, but only in intimate partnership with Lowland norms. Moreover, if it is clear that some elements of this lordly culture – such as feuding and kin networks – had the potential for causing dislocation from the wider Scottish polity, none of them were significant enough during the Covenanting era to make such estrangement a reality. The point of all this is that the 'Highland' nature of the far north – or, more precisely, the degree of separateness implied by its hybrid identity – should not be overstated. This crucially informs any assessment of the Covenanters' system of local administration, for the existence of a recognisable government structure, incorporating tradition alongside innovation, and adept at exploiting all and any channels for transmitting its authority – a hybrid system to match a hybrid society – meant that the far north was firmly within the boundaries of the Scottish state, rather than being disregarded or relegated to the status of an internal colony. Even more importantly, this government structure relied, as it did throughout Scotland, on the active co-operation of local elites, especially, but not exclusively, lords and family leaders. As a strategy this was not foolproof, especially after 1647, but the authorities were fortunate in enjoying a high degree of adherence and active loyalty in the far north, predicated on a mixture of opportunism and principle. This, indeed, was the cornerstone of Covenanting government in the far north as elsewhere; indirect rule reliant upon the use of local elites as intermediaries for transmitting and sustaining central authority. The revolutionary government in the northern Highlands was, in other words, sustained in exactly the same way as it was farther south, by carefully reshaping classic Stuart mechanisms of control.

Where then does the north-Highland experience fit on the broader canvas of centre-periphery relations in seventeenth-century Europe? The employment of indirect strategies of control, the exploitation of regional social and political structures, and the accommodation of cultural diversity all point towards an emphatically 'collaborative' relationship between Edinburgh and the far north. This is significant because the Covenanting period was clearly marked by robust increases in the reach and sophistication of Scottish central government, not least as regards the institution of Parliament. The northern Highlands, then, provide an example of non-linear progression, in which bureaucratic reform and administrative radicalism were offset by a cautious relationship with pre-existing mechanisms of local authority. There are parallels here with continental historiography, notably William Beik's study of Languedoc, which twenty years ago reached a broadly similar conclusion about Bourbon France.[103] But if consideration of the Covenanters' relationship with the northern Highlands does not reveal anything inherently original, it does add an unusual and under-utilised perspective to a familiar debate, a perspective which, in illustrating the extent to which the diffusion of authority underlay the power of the revolutionary government in Scotland, also highlights the complexity and ambiguity of the state-building process in early-modern Europe.

[103] Beik, W., *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge, 1997, first published 1985).

Appendix: Offices and Office-holders

The following lists the raw data upon which the statistical information in tables one to three is based. The bulk of it is drawn from the parliamentary record. It does not represent a comprehensive inventory of all governmental or administrative offices in existence under the Covenanters, but only includes those that involved northern Highland individuals. Moreover, it is limited by the sources, and only covers those offices for which it was possible to identify at least one appointee.[104]

Offices

Office Type	Office
Executive: Central	Committee of Estates
	Committee of Revisions
	Committee of Losses
	Committee for the North
	Privy Council
	Committee for Distressed Ministers
	Subcommittee anent Idle Beggars
	Committee to Gather Subscriptions to the Covenant
	Committee for the Affairs of the Army
	Committee for the Plantation of Kirks
	Lord Privy Seal
	Committee for Reports
	Committee for the Valuation of Teinds
Executive: Local	Committee of War for Caithness
	Committee of War for Elgin, Nairn and Inverness

[104] *RPS*, 1643/6/91, 1644/6/182, 1644/6/225, 1645/1/181, 1645/7/24/87, 1646/11/34, 1646/11/356, 1646/11/364, 1646/11/532, 1648/3/79, 1648/3/210, 1648/3/213, 1649/1/87, 1649/1/255, 1649/1/293, 1649/1/309, 1649/1/335, 1649/5/376, A1650/5/116, A1650/11/20, A1651/3/16, A1651/5/8, M1650/11/3 and at M1651/5/4; *RPCS*, vii, p.102, pp.164-70, p.180, pp.288-92 and at p.335; Stevenson, *Government of Scotland*, p.82; Young, M. D. (ed.), *The Parliaments of Scotland: Burgh and Shire Commissioners*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1992), ii, p.772, pp.778-9, pp.787-8, p.791, p.795 and at p.800.

	Committee of War for Inverness and Sutherland
	Committee of War for Inverness
	Committee of War for Sutherland
Judicial	Commission to Apprehend Jesuits
	Commission to Conduct Perambulations
	Commission to Hold Justice Courts
	Commission to Suppress Criminals in the Highlands
	Commission to Transfer the Laird of Drum
	Commission for the Burnt and Wasted Lands of Inverness-shire
	Committee for those in the Castle
	Sherriff-Clerk of Caithness
	Sheriff Principal of Caithness
	Sheriff Principal of Inverness
	Sheriff Principal of Ross
	Sheriff Principal of Sutherland
Representative	Commissioner to Parliament for Caithness
	Commissioner to Parliament for Dornoch (burgh)
	Commissioner to Parliament for Inverness (burgh)
	Commissioner to Parliament for Inverness-shire
	Commissioner to Parliament for Ross-shire
	Commissioner to Parliament for Sutherland
	Commissioner to Parliament for Tain (burgh)

Office-Holders

Family Affiliations	Name	Social Status
Cameron	Ewan Cameron of Locheil	Laird
Campbell	Archibald Campbell, 1st marquess of Argyll	Noble
	Patrick Campbell of Boath	Laird
Chisholm	Alexander Chisholm of Comar	Laird
Fraser of Lovat	Alexander Fraser, tutor of Lovar	Laird
	Hugh Fraser of Belladrum	Laird
	Hugh Fraser of Foyers	Laird
	Hugh Fraser of Kinneries	Laird

	Hugh Fraser, 7th lord Lovat	Noble
	Hugh Fraser, master of Lovat	Laird
	Hugh Fraser of Struy	Laird
	Sir James Fraser of Brae	Laird
	Simon Fraser, master of Lovat	Laird
	Thomas Fraser of Strichen	Laird
	William Fraser of Culboky	Laird
Gordon (of Huntly)	George Gordon, 2nd marquess of Huntly	Noble
	George Gordon, lord Gordon	Noble
Gordon (of Sutherland)	Alexander Gordon of Carrell	Laird
	George Gordon of Sutherland	Laird
	Sir John Gordon of Embo	Laird
	John Gordon, 14th earl of Suterhland	Noble
	Hugh Gordon of Drumjoy	Laird
	Sir Robert Gordon	Laird
	William Gordon of Doil	Laird
Grant	John Grant of Ballindalloch	Laird
	Sir John Grant of Freuchie	Laird
	John Grant of Gillewappil	Laird
	John Grant of Lurg	Laird
	John Grant of Moyness	Laird
Gray	Alexander Gray of Ospisdale	Laird
	Alexander Gray of Spinnigsdale	Laird
	Robert Gray	Laird
	Robert Gray of Ballone	Laird
	Robert Gray of Culmaily	Laird
	Robert Gray of Skibo	Laird
	Robert Gray of Swordale	Laird
Gunn	Alexander Gunn of Kilearnan	Laird
Macdonald	Sir Donald Macdonald of Sleat	Laird
Mackay	Hugh Mackay of Scourie	Laird
	William Mackay of Bighouse	Laird
Mackenzie	Alexander Mackenzie of Kilcowie	Laird
	George Munro, 2nd earl of Seaforth	Noble
	Sir John Mackenzie of Tarbat	Laird

	Rory Mackenzie of Redcastle	Laird
	Simon Mackenzie of Lochslin	Laird
	George Mackenzie, younger of Tarbat	Laird
	Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscarden	Laird
Mackintosh	Lachlan Mackintosh	Laird
	James Mackintosh of Thorneagrane	Laird
	William Mackintosh of that Ilk	Laird
	William Mackintosh of Holm	Laird
	William Mackintosh of Killachie	Laird
	William Mackintosh of Torcastle	Laird
Macleod	Neil Macleod of Assynt	Laird
	Sir John Macleod of Dunvegan	Laird
	Rory Macleod of Dunvegan	Laird
	Rory Macleod of Talister	Laird
Macpherson	Alexander Macpherson of Esig	Laird
	Dougal Macpherson	Burgess
Munro	David Munro	Burgess
	David Munro of Buckies	Laird
	Hugh Munro of Contullich	Laird
	John Munro of Lamlair	Laird
	Neil Munro of Findon	Laird
	Sir Robert Munro of Obsdale/Foulis	Laird
Ross	David Ross of Balnagown	Laird
	David Ross of Holm	Laird
	James Ross of Pettindreich	Laird
	John Ross of Aldie	Laird
	John Ross of Markness	Laird
	Thomas Ross of Priesthill	Laird
	Walter Ross of Invercharron	Laird
	William Ross of Clava	Laird
	William Ross of Grunyard	Laird
	David Ross of Pitcalnie	Laird
Sinclair	Alexander Sinclair of Lathrone	Laird
	Alexander Sinclair of Rachlow	Laird
	David Sinclair	Laird

	Francis Sinclair of Northfield	Laird
	Francis Sinclair of Tasbuster	Laird
	George Sinclair, 5th earl of Caithness	Noble
	James Sinclair of Brims Ness	Laird
	James Sinclair of Broum	Laird
	Sir James Sinclair of Canisbay	Laird
	James Sinclair of Forse	Laird
	James Sinclair of Kelter	Laird
	Sir James Sinclair of Murkle	Laird
	James Sinclair of Ratter	Laird
	John Sinclair of Assery	Laird
	John Sinclair, master of Berriedale	Laird
	Sir John Sinclair of Dunbeath	Laird
	Sir John Sinclair of Hermiston	Laird
	John Sinclair of Tennache	Laird
	Patrick Sinclair	Laird
	Patrick Sinclair of Ulbster	Laird
	Sir William Sinclair of Catboll	Laird
	William Sinclair of Lun	Laird
Sutherland	Alexander Sutherland of Duffus	Laird
	James Sutherland of Forse	Laird
	John Sutherland of Clyne	Laird
	John Sutherland of Kinsteary	Laird
Urquhart	Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty	Laird
Other	George Abernethy	Burgess
	William Baillie of Dunean	Burgess
	Duncan Bain of Kilmore	Burgess
	John Bain of Tulloch	Burgess
	Alexander Brodie of that Ilk	Laird
	Alexander Brodie of Lethane	Laird
	Alexander Bruce of Holland	Burgess
	Walter Bruce of Ham	Burgess
	William Bruce of Holm	Laird
	William Bruce of Stansell	Laird
	David Budge	Burgess

	Charles Caddell of Lynegar	Laird
	Alexander Cogle of that Ilk	Laird
	David Cogle	Laird
	John Corbett of Litlerani	Laird
	John Cunningham of Bremhill	Laird
	John Cuthbert of Drakies	Burgess
	John Cuthbert of Castlehill	Burgess
	Captain James Davidson	Unknown
	John Davidson	Burgess
	Hector Douglas of Mulderg	Gentry
	Alexander Dunbar of Bennatfield	Gentry
	Alexander Dunbar of Boath	Gentry
	Alexander Dunbar of Westfield	Gentry
	Ninian Dunbar of Grange	Gentry
	Robert Dunbar of Easterfield	Gentry
	Thomas Dunbar, tutor of Grange	Gentry
	William Dollas of Cantra	Gentry
	Duncan Forbes of Culloden	Burgess
	Alexander Forrester of Colinald	Burgess
	Alexander Forrester of Edderton	Burgess
	Sir George Hamilton of Blackburn	Gentry
	John Hay	Burgess
	John Hay of Knockcoudie	Burgess
	Alexander Innes of Borrowstone	Gentry
	Major James Innes	Unknown
	James Innes of Sandside	Gentry
	John Innes of Thirsetter	Gentry
	Robert Innes	Burgess
	Robert Innes of Culrossie	Gentry
	Sir Robert Innes of that Ilk	Gentry
	Captain William Innes	Unknown
	William Innes of Borlum	Gentry
	Walter Innes of Inverbreakie	Gentry
	Lieutenant Colonel James Jack	Unknown
	Thomas Kinnaird of Cowbin	Gentry

	Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Leslie	Unknown
	Captain Laurence Lundie	Unknown
	Thomas Manson	Burgess
	Alexander McAlexander	Burgess
	Angus McBain of Tordarroch	Burgess
	John McBain of Kinkell	Burgess
	Andrew McCulloch of Glastulloch	Burgess
	James McCulloch	Burgess
	Thomas McCulloch	Burgess
	Alexander Mullikan	Burgess
	John Murray of Pennyland	Burgess
	Robert Murray	Burgess
	Robert Murray of Pulrossie	Gentry
	Robert Murray of Spinnigsdale	Gentry
	Robert Murray of Thurso	Gentry
	Walter Murray of Abercorse	Burgess
	Walter Murray of Pitgurdie	Gentry
	Walter Murray	Burgess
	John Polson	Burgess
	William Robertson of Inshes	Burgess
	Hugh Rose of Kilravock	Gentry
	Hugh Rose of Little Torsell	Gentry
	James Rose of Merkinch	Burgess
	Thomas Shives of Muirton	Burgess
	James Stuart, 4th earl of Moray	Noble
	Walter Swinton	Burgess
	Thomas Tulloch	Burgess